

# Emotional Experiences of Agro-Industry Exporters Amid Global Price Fluctuations: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study

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## ABSTRACT

Global trade volatility is a major concern in economic and industrial research, especially for agro-industry exporters who are vulnerable to international market shifts. While prior studies have examined the economic effects of price instability, less attention has been given to the emotional experiences of exporters in such contexts. This study explores how agro-industry exporters in Indonesia emotionally interpret and respond to global price changes, emphasizing subjective dimensions that are often neglected. Adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach, the study investigates the lived experiences of ten Indonesian agro-exporters. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Findings reveal four central emotional themes: anxiety over market uncertainty, fear of financial and reputational loss, emotional connection to global trade, and reliance on faith and family for coping. These insights show that exporters construct meaning and identity through their engagement with volatile markets, portraying trade as both an economic and existential endeavor. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of economic resilience by incorporating emotional and cultural perspectives, and encourages future research into cross-cultural emotional responses to market volatility.



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## INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of global trade, agro-industry exporters play a vital role in connecting domestic production with international markets. In emerging economies like Indonesia, this sector is particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices, influenced by factors such as geopolitical conflict, climate change, currency instability, and changing consumer preferences. Such volatility disrupts market stability and places considerable pressure on exporters, whose livelihoods and professional identities are closely linked to these forces.

Although trade liberalization and market dynamics are widely discussed from macroeconomic viewpoints, the personal experiences of exporters navigating these uncertainties have received less scholarly attention. Agro-exporters must often make quick decisions, absorb financial shocks, and uphold product standards—while simultaneously managing the emotional strain caused by income instability, contract failures, and the loss of global clients. These challenges are further intensified by socio-cultural expectations, where business outcomes are associated with social status, family obligations, and regional identity.

Given these pressures, the emotional responses of agro-exporters are not simply economic reactions but also deeply personal and social experiences. The phenomenon of global price fluctuation, therefore, must be understood not only as a technical or financial issue but as a human experience marked by anxiety, resilience, hope, and existential uncertainty. Yet, these subjective dimensions remain largely underexplored in current economic and business research.

Phenomenology offers a lens through which to access and illuminate the meaning of these experiences. Rather than quantifying stress or cataloging economic behaviors, this approach centers on how individuals live through and make sense of the instability they face. By exploring the emotional experiences of agro-industry exporters in response to global price fluctuations, the present study

responds to the need for a more profound understanding of how such economic phenomena are embodied, interpreted, and endured in everyday life.

Research on individual experiences in navigating economic phenomena has increasingly gained scholarly attention, particularly within the fields of economic sociology, behavioral economics, and qualitative business studies. In the context of agro-industrial exportation, the subjective dimensions of global price volatility—such as emotional distress, psychological resilience, and existential uncertainty—represent critical but underexplored aspects of how individuals engage with economic change. Understanding these lived experiences is essential for developing policies and support systems that align with the realities faced by exporters in volatile markets.

However, methodological limitations have constrained deeper insight into these subjective realms. Much of the existing research on exporters has relied on quantitative tools such as surveys and econometric models, which tend to abstract and generalize behavior while overlooking the richness of personal meaning-making. These approaches often fail to capture how exporters interpret and internalize economic instability, or how they emotionally respond to the uncertainties of international trade.

This limitation has led to a growing recognition that traditional methods may be insufficient for comprehensively grasping the essence of emotionally charged phenomena such as financial loss, global market exclusion, or the fear of reputational damage. Without access to the voices and narratives of those who experience these pressures firsthand, a significant portion of the human dimension remains obscured. Consequently, the interpretative phenomenological approach offers a compelling alternative—one that enables the researcher to access the personal and contextual meanings embedded within the emotional responses of agro-industry exporters. This approach aligns with the urgent need to move beyond surface-level analyses and into the realm of human experience, where the economic and the existential intersect in powerful ways.

In response to the challenges posed by global price fluctuations, conventional responses within the agro-industrial sector have largely relied on practical solutions such as financial hedging, export diversification, and government subsidies. While such strategies offer economic mitigation, they are predominantly technical in nature and do not engage with the personal experiences of those affected. Existing studies tend to measure impact through quantitative indicators—such as revenue loss, export volume decline, or cost variability—without accounting for the emotional and existential dimensions that accompany these changes.

This reliance on instrumental approaches has resulted in a limited understanding of how agro-industry exporters experience, interpret, and emotionally respond to economic volatility. Quantitative models are inherently constrained in their ability to capture the depth of human experience, often excluding nuances such as fear, pride, uncertainty, and resilience that shape decision-making and self-perception in high-pressure trade environments (Rahman et al., 2020; Li & Zhang, 2021). Consequently, the emotional labor, psychological toll, and identity negotiation embedded in these experiences remain under-theorized and underrepresented in the literature.

A more holistic and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon requires shifting the lens from external outcomes to internal meaning. Phenomenology, particularly in its interpretative form, offers a powerful alternative by focusing on lived experience and the construction of meaning through individual narratives. This method allows researchers to access the essence of what it means to endure market volatility—not as a macroeconomic variable, but as a deeply personal, often transformative experience. Despite its potential, phenomenological inquiry into this domain remains scarce, leaving a significant gap in knowledge that this study aims to address.

Several studies have explored the economic behavior of exporters in response to global market instability, but few have focused on how these individuals emotionally experience such volatility. Research in economic sociology and behavioral economics has highlighted the psychological burden faced by entrepreneurs in high-risk environments. However, these studies often employ generalized frameworks and overlook the subjective meanings that shape daily decision-making. Some qualitative inquiries have touched upon stress, adaptation, or resilience, yet they rarely delve into the lived experiences unique to agro-industry exporters. This gap reveals a limited understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of price instability in global trade.

To address this limitation, the present study adopts an interpretative phenomenological approach. This method emphasizes the subjective nature of experience and seeks to uncover the meaning individuals assign to complex, often stressful phenomena. It was chosen to explore how exporters emotionally navigate the challenges of global price fluctuations beyond surface-level behaviors. The study answers the need to understand this experience from the inside—from the perspectives of those who live it. By doing so, it provides insight into the personal, social, and existential dimensions of exporting under economic pressure.

This article is structured as follows: the introduction presents the background and rationale for the study. The method section outlines the phenomenological design, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. The results section presents key themes that emerged from participant narratives, illustrated with direct quotations. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the contributions and suggests directions for future research.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore the emotional experiences of agro-industry exporters facing global price fluctuations. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as it prioritizes the subjective interpretations of individuals and allows for an in-depth exploration of how participants make sense of their lived experiences within specific socio-economic contexts. IPA emphasizes the co-construction of meaning between participant narratives and interpretative frameworks, making it particularly appropriate for uncovering the complex emotional dynamics involved in navigating volatile global markets. The research design was structured to capture nuanced emotional responses and meaning-making processes, with a focus on depth rather than breadth.

### **Participants**

Participants included experienced exporters operating in the agro-industrial sector who had been directly impacted by fluctuations in global market prices. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select individuals who possessed rich, relevant experiences concerning the phenomenon of interest. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active in the export sector for a minimum of three years, with direct involvement in decision-making processes related to international trade. Individuals who had ceased operations or had no recent export activity were excluded. The study involved ten participants, comprising seven males and three females, aged between 34 and 56 years (mean age: 45.2), representing a diverse range of agro-industrial export commodities including palm oil, coffee, and spices. All participants were based in Indonesia but had active engagement with international markets.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, guided by a flexible interview protocol designed to elicit detailed personal narratives. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet and comfortable settings chosen by participants, ensuring psychological safety and openness during the dialogue. Each session lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. The interview protocol was informed by phenomenological principles and included open-ended questions exploring emotional reactions, personal coping mechanisms, and reflections on market volatility. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual insights. The data collection period spanned three months, allowing for follow-up interviews where clarification or elaboration was required.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which involved a systematic process of identifying significant statements, coding emergent meaning units, and organizing them into overarching themes. The analytic process began with repeated reading of transcripts to ensure familiarity with each narrative. Meaning units were highlighted and labeled with descriptive codes, followed by clustering these codes into broader interpretive themes that captured shared patterns across participant accounts. NVivo 12 software was employed to assist with organizing transcripts, storing

codes, and visualizing relationships between themes. However, the core interpretative process remained manual and iterative, grounded in phenomenological analysis rather than automated procedures, ensuring that software use did not compromise analytical depth. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis to ensure alignment with the epistemological stance of the study. The final themes were developed through iterative comparison and abstraction, representing the essential structures of emotional experience shared among participants.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (Approval No: [masukkan nomor etik jika tersedia]), prior to data collection. All participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study. Informed written consent was obtained from each participant prior to their involvement. Participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Identifiable information was removed during transcription and data storage complied with data protection regulations. The study adhered to internationally recognized ethical standards in human subject research, including the Declaration of Helsinki.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings derived from in-depth, interpretative phenomenological analysis of the participants' lived emotional experiences in the face of global price fluctuations in the agro-industry. The results are organized thematically to reflect the essential patterns of meaning that emerged from the narratives of exporters. Each theme is presented through rich narrative description and supported by direct quotations from participants to ensure authenticity and contextual validation.

### **The Emotional Turbulence of Market Volatility**

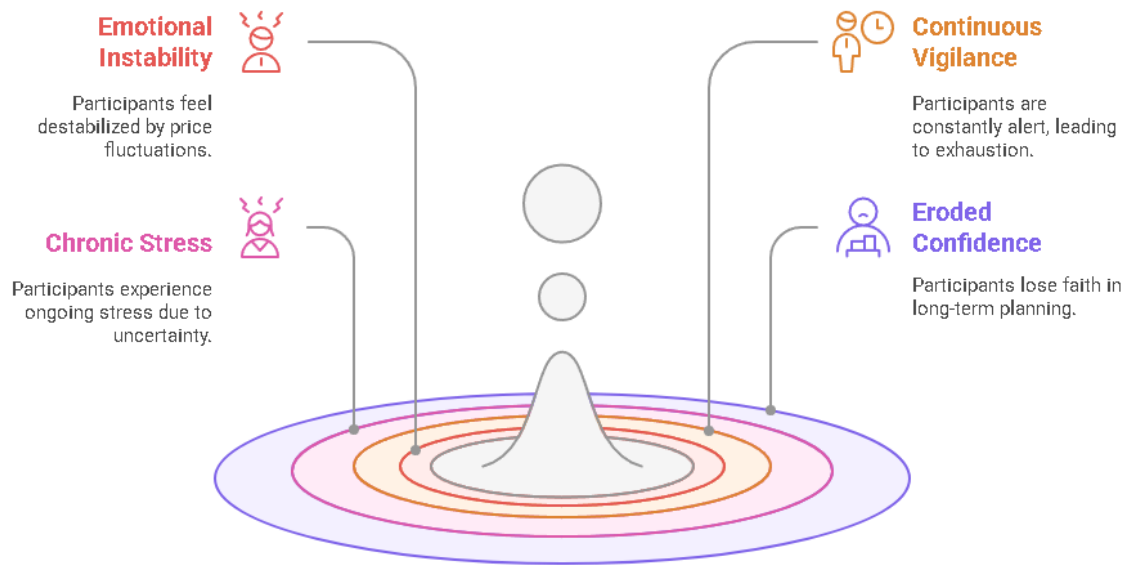
Participants consistently described the experience of global price fluctuations as emotionally destabilizing, often using metaphors related to uncertainty, instability, and helplessness. The rapid and often unpredictable changes in international market prices disrupted not only their business planning but also their psychological stability.

“It feels like being on a boat in a storm—you try to steer, but the waves are too strong. I feel anxious every time the price drops. It’s not just numbers—it’s my life, my family’s income.” (Participant 4)

The uncertainty generated a sense of continuous vigilance, which many participants described as emotionally exhausting. The unpredictability of profit margins also led to chronic stress and an erosion of confidence in long-term planning.

“I wake up at 3 a.m. to check the international prices. That’s not healthy, but I can’t help it. If I miss a drop, I might lose everything I worked for.” (Participant 7)

### **Emotional Impact of Market Volatility**



### Emotional Attachment to the Global Market

Interestingly, several participants expressed a paradoxical emotional connection to the global market, viewing it both as a source of opportunity and a source of suffering. Despite the volatility, many exporters maintained a deep sense of pride and belonging in the international trade landscape.

“I feel like I’m part of something bigger. When my product is accepted overseas, it feels like I matter. But when prices fall... it’s like the world rejects me.” (Participant 2)

This emotional attachment also brought about feelings of personal responsibility for maintaining product quality and competitiveness, which intensified the emotional impact of price fluctuations.

### Fear of Failure and Loss of Dignity

Beyond economic concerns, participants often associated price instability with the fear of social and personal failure. Exporters reported experiencing shame and a perceived loss of dignity when they were unable to fulfill business promises or sustain livelihoods.

“When I can’t pay my workers or meet deadlines, it’s not just business—it’s my integrity. It hurts. People start losing respect.” (Participant 5)

These experiences reflect how deeply intertwined their economic roles were with their identities, and how fluctuations in the global market could lead to emotional crises beyond financial dimensions.

### Coping through Faith, Family, and Resilience

Despite the emotional strain, participants revealed various coping strategies rooted in family support, religious beliefs, and personal resilience. Many described turning to prayer, community support, or family encouragement as ways to manage emotional distress.

“When prices go down, I pray more. It gives me peace. My wife always tells me, ‘We’ve been through worse.’ That helps me breathe.” (Participant 1)

The narratives highlighted the exporters’ capacity to endure adversity and reframe their struggles through emotional adaptation, drawing strength from their values and support systems.

The lived experiences of agro-industry exporters facing global price fluctuations reveal a multidimensional emotional landscape—marked by anxiety, attachment, fear, and resilience. These experiences are deeply personal, often embedded within broader social, economic, and cultural contexts. The emotional responses to price volatility cannot be detached from identity, meaning-making, and psychological survival strategies employed by the participants.

The findings of this study reveal that agro-industry exporters experience global price fluctuations not merely as financial events, but as deeply emotional and identity-shaping experiences. Participants articulated a complex emotional landscape involving anxiety, fear of failure, pride in global participation, and reliance on personal coping mechanisms—providing direct insight into the lived reality behind economic volatility. These findings respond directly to the central research question: How do agro-industry exporters experience and interpret the emotional impact of global price fluctuations in their business adaptation?

The results demonstrate that exporters internalize price instability as a challenge that goes beyond economics, affecting their sense of dignity, responsibility, and belonging. This study contributes uniquely to the literature by articulating the meanings and emotional interpretations that exporters attach to fluctuations—meanings that are absent in existing economic models. It shows that exporters' responses are not solely strategic or reactive, but are grounded in personal values, familial expectations, and existential concerns. By surfacing these interpretations, the study offers a more human-centered understanding of economic resilience in high-volatility sectors.

The findings align with and extend previous literature on emotional labor in entrepreneurship (Ferreira & Gomes, 2023) and psychological resilience in industrial workforces (Smith & James, 2019), while also addressing gaps identified by Rahman et al. (2020), who highlighted the inability of survey-based methods to capture emotional nuance. Unlike prior studies that focused on outcomes or policy impacts, this research illuminates the meaning-making process that exporters undergo—how they narrate their struggles, endure uncertainty, and draw strength from cultural, religious, and familial frameworks. These insights reaffirm the value of phenomenology in uncovering layers of subjective experience often overlooked in industrial economic analysis.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the personal narratives of agro-industry exporters. On a broader level, the study highlights the emotional labor embedded within global trade participation, particularly in sectors vulnerable to price instability. Understanding the subjective experiences of exporters can inform the design of more empathetic and responsive support systems, including mental health services, policy communication strategies, and community-based resilience programs. Socially, the findings underscore the importance of recognizing exporters not only as economic agents but as individuals navigating complex psychological and cultural landscapes. This reframing encourages policymakers and industry stakeholders to incorporate emotional and cultural dimensions into their responses to market volatility.

Despite the rich insights generated, this study is not without limitations. The findings are grounded in a specific socio-cultural and economic context—that of Indonesian agro-industry exporters—limiting their transferability to other settings or sectors. The use of purposive sampling and a relatively small number of participants, while consistent with phenomenological inquiry, also restricts generalizability. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced subjective bias, though strategies such as member checking and contextual triangulation were applied to enhance credibility. These limitations should be seen not as shortcomings, but as invitations for further exploration.

Future research could expand on these findings by examining similar emotional experiences among exporters in different national or industrial contexts, allowing for cross-cultural comparison of meaning-making processes. Longitudinal studies may also provide insights into how these emotional narratives evolve over time, particularly in response to prolonged or repeated economic shocks. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaborations—linking phenomenological inquiry with behavioral economics or organizational psychology—could deepen our understanding of how emotions shape market behavior and resilience. Such directions hold potential to enrich both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions in the field of economic and industrial studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the emotional experiences of agro-industry exporters in facing global price fluctuations, addressing a critical gap in understanding the subjective realities behind economic

volatility. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, the research revealed that exporters perceive market instability as a deeply personal and identity-defining challenge. Key findings highlight emotional themes such as anxiety, fear of failure, resilience, and pride in global participation, which shape how exporters navigate uncertainty. These insights contribute a human-centered perspective often absent in previous quantitative or policy-focused studies.

To translate these findings into actionable impact, policymakers are encouraged to design trade support programs that acknowledge the emotional dimensions of export engagement—such as peer support networks, psychological resilience training, and adaptive stress management resources tailored to exporters. Trade facilitation agencies and professional associations could integrate emotional literacy into exporter development programs, especially for SMEs vulnerable to global shocks. Additionally, government bodies may consider embedding emotional well-being metrics into export readiness assessments to offer more holistic and sustainable forms of intervention. The study thus underscores the importance of integrating emotional and experiential dimensions into industrial and trade policy frameworks. Future research may build on this foundation by examining similar experiences across cultural or sectoral contexts, offering a richer understanding of resilience in global trade.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest..

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